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Our Dying Forests

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OUR DYING FORESTS.

During the past decade attention has been widely directed to our constantly diminishing forests. The subject is now undergoing thorough and exhaustive examination by the Agricultural Department at Washington, as well as by private investigators. It is also studied in the light of the most advanced science in many of the Industrial Schools, from all which good results may be confidently expected. Ours having been so largely a prairie state, the losses are not so directly appreciable, though thousands of young trees —the "second growth" in the original woodlands—have been dying for several years. This is no doubt due to the dry seasons of the past fifteen years, though the use of the woodlands for pastures has had much influence in that direction. As bearing upon this subject, we may state upon the high authority of Prof. J. L. Budd, who was so long at the head of the horticultural department of our Agricultural College, that in 1894 the forest trees made no growth of wood whatever. They leaved out and barely lived. The conditions of forest growth during several years, and especially in 1894, throughout a wide extent of country, were most adverse. At the same time apple trees of Russian origin sent out shoots to the length of 18 to 20 inches, showing that in our own worst seasons the conditions were still favorable to their growth.

The estimated percentages of loss vary very much, depending upon location and drainage. This becomes obvious to any one who travels "up and along the valley of the Des Moines" and its tributaries, doubtless prevailing to a greater or less degree in all parts of the State. On some of the

higher bluffs from 40 to 90 per cent of this young timber has died out, and that which is left alive is making but a feeble growth, though it has been doing better the past two years. Another cause is annually proving destructive to thousands of these "second growth" trees. The beautiful hickories, maples, ash, elms, walnuts and lindens, all of which are growing into such precious material for manufacturing purposes, are in demand for fuel. They make ideal firewood, but the cutting of such young trees for this purpose is criminally wasteful.

These are startling facts, but there is still another which has a most important bearing upon the subject. Little or no timber—very few seedlings—are coming forward to take the place of that which is so rapidly fading away. This is due to several causes. The old coating of forest leaves, which always kept the ground moist, and in a state of most natural cultivation, no longer exists. The leaves that fall are cut to pieces by the hoofs of horses and cattle and no longer fulfill their old beneficent mission of fertilizing and protecting the surface of the earth. Blue grass has penetrated into every nook and corner of our woodlands, and is performing a powerful work in dessicating the surface of the earth. These causes prevent the germination of nuts and tree seeds, so that one may often walk half a day in the woods without seeing a single little tree unfolding its first leaves. Fewer nuts and seeds are produced than in former years. In the vicinity of towns most of the nuts are gathered by the boys, so that few are left to sprout and grow to maturity. And farther yet, cattle, horses and sheep have a wonderful penchant for nipping off the leaves and branches of little trees. If the intelligent reader will bear these facts in mind the next time he goes into the timber, he will look in vain for the nooks and corners which were thickly studded with a young growth of forest trees 30 to 50 years ago. When we take into account the rapidity with which this "second growth," which began its life about the close of the Civil War, is now dying out or

disappearing before the woodman's axe, coupled with the fact that little or no new growth is coming on to take its place, the prospect for the supply of native timber a generation hence is, indeed, a dubious one. Congress and the state legislatures, and the teachers of forestry, cannot act too quickly to avert a scarcity which is even now at our doors.

The foregoing paragraphs were submitted to Prof. Budd, who has had a large experience in practical forestry. His opinions possess high value, and we are glad to be able to make them a matter of record in our pages. He writes as follows:

I return the paper. It is all right except that not enough stress is laid on the needed forest conditions. In this vicinity and over the State, the native and planted timber from which stock has been excluded, was never thriftier than at the present time. Not a single root-killed tree can be found. But whole groves of native second growth and planted groves have been root-killed where the roots were exposed by tramping of stock. In Europe all forest growth has forest conditions as to leaves, leaf mould and undergrowth. Where stock is excluded unexpected seedlings spring up from bird-planted seed. In a grove of conifers I have in Benton county, Thorn's Black Cherry, Bird Cherry, Hackberry, and other trees are coming up wherever open spaces are found. J. L. BUDD.

ASLEEP IN BATTLE.

George F. Schoonover, a bright young printer, enlisted at Cedar Rapids, on the 24th day of April, 1861, in Company K, First Iowa Infantry. He was in the battle of Wilson's Creek, Mo., and in the charge led by Gen. Nathaniel Lyon, when that great soldier was killed. Soon after his arrival home he gave the writer an interesting account of his experiences in that memorable affair. He was wounded in this way: A grape shot passed under his left arm, inflicting a severe bruise both upon the body and the arm. The shot went into the ground a few inches and the young man dug it out with his bayonet. The bruised surfaces remained "black and blue" for some time after he was discharged. Among other things, he said he went to sleep in the midst